

***JULIA WARD
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***A TRIP
TO CUBA***

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CHAPTER I.

THE DEPARTURE.

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WHY one leaves home at all is a question that travellers are sure, sooner or later, to ask themselves,—I mean, pleasure-travellers. Home, where one has the "Transcript" every night, and the "Autocrat" every month, opera, theatre, circus, and good society, in constant rotation,—home, where everybody knows us, and the little good there is to know about us,—finally, home, as seen regretfully for the last time, with the gushing of long frozen friendships, the priceless kisses of children, and the last sad look at dear baby's pale face through the window-pane,—well, all this is left behind, and we review it as a dream, while the railroad-train hurries us along to the spot where we are to leave, not only this, but Winter, rude tyrant, with all our precious hostages in his grasp. Soon the swift motion lulls our brains into the accustomed muddle. We seem to be dragged along like a miserable thread pulled through the eye of an everlasting needle,—through and through, and never through,—while here and there, like painful knots, the *dépôts* stop us, the poor thread is arrested for a minute, and then the pulling begins again. Or, in another dream, we are like fugitives threading the gauntlet of the grim forests, while the ice-bound trees essay a charge of bayonets on either side; but, under the guidance of our fiery Mercury, we pass them as safely as ancient Priam passed the outposts of the Greeks,—and New York, hospitable as Achilles, receives

us in its mighty tent. Here we await the "Karnak," the British Mail Company's new screw-steamer, bound for Havana, *viâ* Nassau. At length comes the welcome order to "be on board." We betake ourselves thither,—the anchor is weighed, the gun fired, and we take leave of our native land with a patriotic pang, which soon gives place to severer spasms.

I do not know why all celebrated people who write books of travels begin by describing their days of sea-sickness. Dickens, George Combe, Fanny Kemble, Mrs. Stowe, Miss Bremer, and many others, have opened in like manner their valuable remarks on foreign countries. While intending to avail myself of their privilege and example, I would nevertheless suggest, for those who may come after me, that the subject of sea-sickness should be embalmed in science, and enshrined in the crypt of some modern encyclopædia, so that future writers should refer to it only as the Pang Unspeakable, for which *vide* Ripley and Dana, vol., page. But, as I have already said, I shall speak of sea-sickness in a hurried and picturesque manner, as follows:—

Who are these that sit by the long dinner-table in the forward cabin, with a most unusual lack of interest in the bill of fare? Their eyes are closed, mostly, their cheeks are pale, their lips are quite bloodless, and to every offer of good cheer, their "No, thank you," is as faintly uttered as are marriage-vows by maiden lips. Can they be the same that, an hour ago, were so composed, so jovial, so full of dangerous defiance to the old man of the sea? The officer who carves the roast-beef offers at the same time a slice of fat;—this is too much; a panic runs through the ranks, and

the rout is instantaneous and complete. The ghost of what each man was disappears through the trap-door of his state-room, and the hell which the theatre faintly pictures behind the scenes begins in good earnest.

For to what but to Dante's "Inferno" can we liken this steamboat-cabin, with its double row of pits, and its dismal captives? What are these sighs, groans, and despairing noises, but the *alti guai* rehearsed by the poet? Its fiends are the stewards who rouse us from our perpetual torpor with offers of food and praises of shadowy banquets,— "Nice mutton-chop, Sir? roast-turkey? plate of soup?" Cries of "No, no!" resound, and the wretched turn again, and groan. The Philanthropist has lost the movement of the age,—keeled up in an upper berth, convulsively embracing a blanket, what conservative more immovable than he? The Great Man of the party refrains from his large theories, which, like the circles made by the stone thrown into the water, begin somewhere and end nowhere. As we have said, he expounds himself no more, the significant forefinger is down, the eye no longer imprisons yours. But if you ask him how he does, he shakes himself as if, like Farinata,—

"avesse l'inferno in gran dispetto,"—

"he had a very contemptible opinion of hell."

Let me not forget to add, that it rains every day, that it blows every night, and that it rolls through the twenty-four hours till the whole world seems as if turned bottom upwards, clinging with its nails to chaos, and fearing to launch away. The Captain comes and says,— "It is true you have a nasty, short, chopping sea hereabouts; but you see,

she is spinning away down South jolly!" And this is the Gulf-Stream!

But all things have an end, and most things have two. After the third day, a new development manifests itself. Various shapeless masses are carried up-stairs and suffered to fall like snow-flakes on the deck, and to lie there in shivering heaps. From these larvæ gradually emerge features and voices,—the luncheon-bell at last stirs them with the thrill of returning life. They look up, they lean up, they exchange pensive smiles of recognition,—the Steward comes, no fiend this time, but a ministering angel; and lo! the strong man eats broth, and the weak woman clamors for pickled oysters. And so ends my description of our sea-sickness.

For, as for betraying the confidences of those sad days, as for telling how wofully untrue Professors of Temperance were to their principles, how the Apostle of Total Abstinence developed a brandy-flask, not altogether new, what unsuccessful tipplings were attempted in the desperation of nausea, and for what lady that stunning brandy-smasher was mixed,—as for such tales out of school, I would have you know that I am not the man to tell them.

Yet a portrait or so lingers in my mental repository;—let me throw them in, to close off the lot.

No. 1. A sober Bostonian in the next state-room, whose assiduity with his sea-sick wife reminds one of Cock-Robin, in the days when he sent Jenny Wren sops and wine. This person was last seen in a dressing-gown, square-cut night-cap, and odd slippers, dancing up and down the state-room floor with a cup of gruel, making wild passes with a spoon at

an individual in a berth, who never got any of the contents. Item, the gruel, in a moment of excitement, finally ran in a stream upon the floor, and was wiped up by the Steward. Result not known, but disappointment is presumable.

No. 2. A stout lady, imprisoned by a board on a sofa nine inches wide, called by a facetious friend "The Coffin." She complains that her sides are tolerably battered in;—we hold our tongues, and think that the board, too, has had a hard time of it. Yet she is a jolly soul, laughing at her misfortunes, and chirruping to her baby. Her spirits keep up, even when her dinner won't keep down. Her favorite expressions are "Good George!" and "Oh, jolly!" She does not intend, she says, to lay in any dry goods in Cuba, but means to eat up all the good victuals she comes across. Though seen at present under unfavorable circumstances, she inspires confidence as to her final accomplishment of this result.

No. 3. A woman, said to be of a literary turn of mind, in the miserablest condition imaginable. Her clothes, flung at her by the Stewardess seem to have hit in some places, and missed in others. Her listless hands occasionally make an attempt to keep her draperies together, and to pull her hat on her head; but though the intention is evident, she accomplishes little by her motion. She is perpetually being lugged about by a stout steward, who knocks her head against both sides of the vessel, folds her up in the gangway, spreads her out on the deck, and takes her up-stairs, down-stairs, and in my lady's chamber, where, report says, he feeds her with a spoon, and comforts her with such philosophy as he is master of. N.B. This woman, upon the first change of weather, rose like a cork, dressed like a

Christian, and toddled about the deck in the easiest manner, sipping her grog, and cutting sly jokes upon her late companions in misery,—is supposed by some to have been an impostor, and, when ill-treated, announced intentions of writing a book.

No. 4, my last, is only a sketch;—circumstances allowed no more. Can Grande, the great dog, has been got up out of the pit, where he worried the Stewardess and snapped at the friend who tried to pat him on the head. Everybody asks where he is. "Don't you see that heap of shawls yonder, lying in the sun, and heated up to about 212° Fahrenheit? That slouched hat on top marks the spot where his head should lie,—by treading cautiously in the opposite direction you may discover his feet. All between is perfectly passive and harmless. His chief food is pickles,—his only desire is rest. After all these years of controversy, after all these battles, bravely fought and nobly won, you might write with truth upon this moveless mound of woollens the pathetic words from Père la Chaise:—*Implora Pace.*"

But no more at present, for land is in sight, and in my next you shall hear how we found it, and what we saw at Nassau.

CHAPTER II.

NASSAU.

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NASSAU looked very green and pleasant to us after our voyage;—the eyes enjoy a little fresh provision after so long a course of salt food. The first view of land is little more than "the feeling of the thing,"—it is matter of faith, rather than of sight. You are shown a dark and distant line, near the horizon, without color or features. They say it is land, and you believe, it. But you come nearer and nearer,—you see first the green of vegetation, then the form of the trees,—the harbor at last opens its welcome arms,—the anchor is dropped,—the gun fired,—the steam snuffed out. Led by a thread of sunshine, you have walked the labyrinth of the waters, and all their gigantic dangers lie behind you.

We made Nassau at twelve o'clock, on the sixth day from our departure, counting the first as one. The earliest feature discernible was a group of tall cocoa-nut trees, with which the island is bounteously feathered;—the second was a group of negroes in a small boat, steering towards us with open-mouthed and white-toothed wonder. Nothing makes its simple impression upon the mind sophisticated by education. The negroes, as they came nearer, suggested only Christy's Minstrels, of whom they were a tolerably faithful imitation,—while the cocoa-nut trees transported us to the Boston in Ravel-time, and we strained our eyes to see the wonderful ape, Jocko, whose pathetic death, nightly repeated, used to cheat the credulous Bostonians of time,

tears, and treasure. Despite the clumsiest management, the boat soon effected a junction with our gangway, allowing some nameless official to come on board, and to go through I know not what mysterious and indispensable formality. Other boats then came, like a shoal of little fishes around the carcass of a giant whale. There were many negroes, together with whites of every grade; and some of our number, leaning over the side, saw for the first time the raw material out of which Northern Humanitarians have spun so fine a skein of compassion and sympathy.

Now we who write, and they for whom we write, are all orthodox upon this mighty question. We have all made our confession of faith in private and in public; we all, on suitable occasions, walk up and apply the match to the keg of gunpowder which is to blow up the Union, but which, somehow, at the critical moment, fails to ignite. But you must allow us one heretical whisper,—very small and low. The negro of the North is an ideal negro; it is the negro refined by white culture, elevated by white blood, instructed even by white iniquity;—the negro among negroes is a coarse, grinning, flat-footed, thick-skulled creature, ugly as Caliban, lazy as the laziest of brutes, chiefly ambitious to be of no use to any in the world. View him as you will, his stock in trade is small;—he has but the tangible instincts of all creatures,—love of life, of ease, and of offspring. For all else, he must go to school to the white race, and his discipline must be long and laborious. Nassau, and all that we saw of it, suggested to us the unwelcome question whether compulsory labor be not better than none. But as a question

I gladly leave it, and return to the simple narration of what befell.

There was a sort of eddy at the gangway of our steamer, made by the conflicting tides of those who wanted to come on board and of those who wanted to go on shore. We were among the number of the latter, but were stopped and held by the button by one of the former, while those more impatient or less sympathizing made their way to the small boats which waited below. The individual in question had come alongside in a handsome barge, rowed by a dozen stout blacks, in the undress uniform of the Zouaves. These men, well drilled and disciplined, seemed of a different sort from the sprawling, screaming creatures in the other boats, and their bright red caps and white tunics became them well. But he who now claimed my attention was of British birth and military profession. His face was ardent, his pantaloons were of white flannel, his expression of countenance was that of habitual discontent, but with a twinkle of geniality in the eye which redeemed the Grumbler from the usual tedium of his tribe. He accosted us as follows:—

"Go ashore? What for? To see something, eh? There's nothing to see; the island, isn't bigger than a nut-shell, and doesn't contain a single prospect.—Go ashore and get some dinner? There isn't anything to eat there.—Fruit? None to speak of; sour oranges and green bananas.—I went to market last Saturday, and bought one cabbage, one banana, and half a pig's head;—there's a market for you!—Fish? Oh, yes, if you like it.—Turtle? Yes, you can get the Gallipagos turtle; it makes tolerable soup, but has not the green fat,

which, in *my* opinion, is the most important feature in turtle-soup.—Shops? You can't buy a pair of scissors on the island, nor a baby's bottle;—broke mine the other day, and tried to replace it; couldn't.—Society? There are lots of people to call upon you, and bore you to death with returning their visits."

At last the Major went below, and we broke away, and were duly conveyed to *terra firma*. It was Sunday, and late in the afternoon. The first glimpse certainly seemed to confirm the Major's disparaging statements. The town is small; the houses dingy and out of repair; the legend, that paint costs nothing, is not received here; and whatever may have been the original colors of the buildings, the climate has had its own way with them for many a day. The barracks are superior in finish to anything else we see. Government-House is a melancholy-looking *caserne*, surrounded by a piazza, the grounds being adorned with a most chunky and inhuman statue of Columbus. All the houses are surrounded by verandas, from which pale children and languid women in muslins look out, and incline us to ask what epidemic has visited the island and swept the rose from every cheek. They are a pallid race, the Nassauese, and retain little of the vigor of their English ancestry. One English trait they exhibit,—the hospitality which has passed into a proverb; another, perhaps,—the stanch adherence to the forms and doctrines of Episcopacy. We enter the principal church;—they are just lighting it for evening service; it is hung with candles, each burning in a clear glass shade. The walls and ceiling are white-washed, and contrast prettily with the dark timbering of the roof. We would gladly have staid to give thanks for our safe and prosperous voyage, but a black rain-cloud

warns us homeward,—not, however, until we have received a kind invitation from one of the hospitable Islanders to return the next morning for a drive and breakfast.

Returning soon after sunrise to fulfil this promise, we encounter the barracks, and are tempted to look in and see the Sons of Darkness performing their evolutions. The morning drill is about half over. We peep in,—the Colonel, a lean Don Quixote on a leaner Rosinante, dashes up to us with a weak attempt at a canter; he courteously invites us to come in and see all that is to be seen, and lo! our friend the Major, quite gallant in his sword and scarlet jacket, is detailed for our service. The soldiers are black, and very black,—none of your dubious American shades, ranging from clear salmon to *café au lait* or even to *café noir*. These are your good, satisfactory, African sables, warranted not to change in the washing. Their Zouave costume is very becoming, with the Oriental turban, caftan, and loose trousers; and the Philosopher of our party remarks that the African requires costume, implying that the New Englander can stand alone, as can his clothes, in their black rigidity. The officers are white, and the Major very polite; he shows us the men, the arms, the kits, the quarters, and, having done all that he can do for us, relinquishes us with a gallant bow to our Host of the drive and breakfast.

The drive does something to retrieve the character of the island. The road is hard and even, overhung with glossy branches of strange trees bearing unknown fruits, and studded on each side with pleasant villas and with negro huts. There are lovely flowers everywhere, among which the Hibiscus, called South-Sea Rose, and the Oleander, are most

frequent, and most brilliant. We see many tall groves of cocoa-nut, and cast longing glances towards the fruit, which little negroes, with surprising activity, attain and shake down. A sudden turn in the road discloses a lovely view of the bay, with its wonderful green waters, clear and bright as emerald;—there is a little beach, and boats lie about, and groups of negroes are laughing and chattering,—quoting stocks from the last fish-market, very likely. We purchase for half a dollar a bunch of bananas, for which Ford or Palmer would ask us ten dollars at least, and go rejoicing to our breakfast.

Our Host is a physician of the island, English by birth, and retaining his robust form and color in spite of a twenty-years' residence in the warm climate. He has a pleasant family of sons and daughters, all in health, but without a shade of pink in lips or cheeks. The breakfast consists of excellent fried fish, fine Southern hominy,—not the pebbly broken corn which our dealers impose under that name,—various hot cakes, tea and coffee, bananas, sapodillas, and if there be anything else not included in the present statement, let haste and want of time excuse the omission. The conversation runs a good deal on the hopes of increasing prosperity which the new mail-steamer opens to the eyes of the Nassauese. Invalids, they say, will do better there than in Cuba,—it is quieter, much cheaper, and the climate is milder. There will be a hotel very soon, where no attention will be spared, etc., etc. The Government will afford every facility, etc., etc. It seemed indeed a friendly little place, with delicious air and sky, and a good, reasonable, decent, English tone about it. Expenses

moderate, ye fathers of encroaching families. Negroes abundant and natural, ye students of ethnological possibilities. Officers in red jackets, you young ladies,—young ones, some of them. Why wouldn't you all try it, especially as the Captain of the "Karnak" is an excellent sailor, and the kindest and manliest of conductors?